# The Historical Roots of Post-Apartheid Intra-Working-Class Racism

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**Abstract**

Both European colonialism and apartheid shaped the economic history of South Africa, at the heart of which was the super exploitation of Black labour for the benefits of capital, the state, and white labour. While the early mercantile and agricultural economic stages influenced South Africa's racial capitalism, it was the era of the mineral revolution in the late 19th century – as well as the attendant imperative for cheap, Black labour – which formed the bedrock of the Union of South Africa in 1910 and later necessitated the rise of the apartheid state. With vested interests in the racist and later racialist order, which constituted them as the racialised labour aristocracy, white labour conceived of its identity – in racial and cultural terms – as part of European society. Consequently, an increasing social gulf emerged between Black/African labour and white labour, whose world outlooks were deeply immersed in racist metaphysics. Post-apartheid South Africa has inherited this dual, contradictory, and mutually antagonistic historical consciousness. This has been exacerbated by poor economic performance based on a neo-liberal framework, the social visibility of the often-self-assertive emerging Black middle class resulting from government affirmative policies, and the relative impoverishment of the white working class as they begin to face the cut and thrust of labour market with no preferential state cover. In view of this history of racialised capitalism, racism in post-apartheid South Africa is largely located within the Black and white working-class socio-economic space, as the latter forfeited its racially vested interests while the former derive the benefits of corrective state action.

## Introduction

*'Who controls the past controls the future. And who controls the present controls the past.'* – George Orwell

South Africa's history was shaped within the context of European colonialism, beginning in 1492, a period which 'gave the world a centre and a periphery' (Blaunt, 1992: 2). In this racialised global geography, the former was white and European and the latter was African, Asian, and Latin American. As the global climate of racism and racialism began to hold sway as the order of things, the South African localised version of this racialisation phenomenon evolved within an economic context: first of mercantile capitalism, followed by agricultural capitalism, and – with the discovery of minerals in the mid-19th century – industrial capitalism (Terreblanche, 2000, 1994; Magubane, 1979; Elphick and Giliomee, 1979).

Both British colonialism (which took on the hue of racism during the segregation era) and the era of apartheid racialism (starting in 1948) racialised society within the capitalist logic. Black people were turned into a labouring class at the service of the white master population: their super exploitation, land dispossession, and structured low-paid employment guaranteed better remuneration for both capital and the white working class (McDonald, 2006; Terreblanche, 2002). The result of this structured subordination of Black labour was the creation of racialised capitalism, at the heart of which lodged the practice of labour aristocracy. The white workforce, culturally and racially differentiated from the Black workforce, was given tangible stakes in the defence and continuance of the system of racial oppression (Magubane, 1979, 1996; Terreblanche, 1994; De Kiewiet, 1959). Anchored on the ideology of racism at the level of the superstructure, this system of racial privilege fed off prevailing global notions of racial superiority (De Kiewiet, 1957; Magubane, 1979; Fredrickson, 1981).

In view of this history of racialised capitalism (where a racist philosophy legitimated officially sanctioned material inequities), racism in post-apartheid South Africa is largely located within the Black and white working classes. The latter forfeited its racially vested interests, while the Black working class derive benefits from corrective state action. Compounding matters is

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the socially and economically visible upward mobility of some sections of the Black population (i.e. the Black middle class) by dint of affirmative legislation and the attendant process of post-colonial elite formation. At the interface of this epochal social change, marked by the reassertion of scarred African/Black identities and an economy wilting in the doldrums, an undercurrent of hostile intra-working-class relations have emerged.

This essay confines itself to the historical period starting with the formation of the Union Government in 1910. This moment was largely a synthesis of historical currents (mercantile and agricultural capitalism) that moulded the evolution of race and class materially and ideologically, sculpting the enduring character of the emerging society as a racialised capitalist order based on the mineral revolution of the late 18th century.

This essay argues that through both the historical phases of British segregation (racism, 1910–1948) and apartheid (racialism, 1948—1980s), the white working class consciousness was infused with what Fukuyama calls megalothymia (2018: 22), 'something that by its very nature cannot be shared because it is based on one's position relative to someone else'. Megalothymia, as Fukuyama further elaborates, 'is the desire to be recognised as superior' (2018: 22). In the case of South Africa, it can be understood as a sanctified racial category in which British colonialism and apartheid placed white people.

Still drawing on Fukuyama, I contend that the rising assertion of African nationalism following the dissolution of apartheid reflected isothymia, the 'demand to be respected on an equal basis with other people' (2018: xiii). Framed in egalitarian terms

and expressed through constitutional dispensation, African nationalism was inclusive in its central tenets despite its new-found, post-apartheid euphoric exuberance. However, the need for historical redress meant consciously adopting racially affirming policies. This seemed to rouse the resentment of the white working class, who were just beginning to confront biting post-apartheid capitalist conditions without the familiar protection of the state. Economic stagnation, which failed to either keep up with or bankroll transformation aspirations, meant that the white working class' thymos, 'the part of the soul that craves recognition of dignity' (Fukuyama, 2016: xiii), and isothymia were negatively impacted.

Some scholars ascribe the apparent failure of the post-apartheid state to grow the economy, and thus ensure a fairly commensurate distribution and consumption of public goods to all South Africans, to the neoliberal economic choices the governing party adopted shortly after assuming power (Turok, 2008; Mohammed, in Mbeki, 2011). Stagnant economic conditions in a society with hyper-sensitive racial and ethnic self-consciousness meant not just the exacerbation of inherited mutual resentment between Black and white people, especially of working-class provenance, but also sharpened contradictions within the ethnically differentiated Black labour itself (an equally apposite sub-theme which is beyond the scope of this essay).

**British Segregation and Racial Capitalism, 1910–1948**

A closer look at the history of South Africa reveals intense intra-class animosities preceding but congealing into clearly discernible form in the period after the South African War of 1899–1902 (also widely known as the Anglo-Boer War). Terreblanche (1994, 2001), Magubane (1979, 1996), MacDonald (2006), and Wolpe (1981) attribute the evolution of South Africa's racial capitalism to this period. According to Terreblanche (1994):

> Shortly after the Union, the political alliance between the English- and the Afrikaans-speaking whites was threatened by both groups' need for cheap African labour. To avert an open clash on this issue, the Botha/Smuts government and the English Establishment agreed on an economic

'alliance of gold and maize'. The formula on which this alliance was built – a formula that was inherently exploitative – remained the economic foundation of the system of racial capitalism until the early 1970s.

From Terreblanche's analysis, it follows that racial capitalism is a definite social order characterised by a plethora of racist laws meant to first entrench the vested interests of capital (gold and maize), and second the interests of white workers above those of Black workers. Fukuyama's theory indicates that these asymmetrical racial relations enrooted megalothymia within the people of European descent, while impairing the thymos ('the demand of the soul craving recognition and dignity') as well as the isothymia ('the demand to be respected on an equal basis with other people') of Black people. White supremacy was implanted within white working-class consciousness and tendentiously anchored on material incentives to sustain it within the overall logic of the racist order.

Within the context of developing modernisation in South Africa, the white working class was always protected against competition from the Black working class on the grounds of race (De Kiewiet, 1957; Magubane, 1996). Magubane argues that 'an abstract class analysis not only liquidates the national question, but ignores critical differences in the exploitation of Black and white workers which are due specifically to racism' (1996: 4). Throughout the period of racial domination, from segregation to apartheid, the white and Black proletariats never joined forces; instead, the two working class forces dichotomised racially, what with the collaboration between the state and the pernicious hand of capital (MacDonald, 2006).

After the signing of the Peace of Vereeniging in 1902, four main actors steered the history of the country: the racist state, capital, white workers, and Black workers. On the one hand, it had always been the responsibility of the white government to uphold the racist/racialist order through policies that ensured that no white people were on the same socio-economic level as Black people. On the other hand, capital went along with government's racist policies to the extent that they were congruent with its interests. Where such policies were neither congenial nor compatible, capital simply went it alone. As capital looked after its self-interests, this sometimes meant compromising

the interests of white labour if that meant cutting production costs, most likely resulting in a fallout between capital and white labour. The result was often embittered industrial action by white labour. Industrial action was particularly pronounced in 1907, 1913, 1914, and 1922 (Roux, 1948). Because capital could play off white labour against its Black counterpart when conditions suited it, a template was set which ensured the persistent deterioration of relations between Black and white workers.

Racial capitalism, with the collaboration of state legislation, corralled the white worker into the same camp, but it also calcified structural divisions and inter-racial antagonisms between the white and Black worker through differential material existence grounded in racist metaphysics (Magubane, 1996). With the projection of partisan white settler capitalism's interests as the collective interests of the master society as a whole, the most visible fault lines in South Africa became Black people as the oppressed and white people as the oppressors. This, of course, did not mean that white society was economically monolithic, as the preceding section demonstrates (De Kiewiet, 1957; Hazlett, 1993). Therefore, in terms of South Africa's violent colonial modernisation history, it remains true that 'race is... the modality in which class is "lived," the medium through which class relations are experienced...' (Hall, 1980, in Morley, 2019: 216).

From the beginning of the European conquest of South Africa, racism and coerced labour were the most dominant attributes of social relations. Conquest was dressed in racist garb and, as Jacklyn Cock and Julia Wells (2020) argue, 'deeply embedded in British colonialism, these settler elites soon articulated and perpetrated a virulent racism.' According to Magubane, 'throughout the period of colonialism, segregation and apartheid, attempts were made to reduce the African into a permanent sub-proletariat on whom the prosperity of the political economy of the settler economy rested' (2007: 178).

Terreblanche (1994) argues that the period between 1910 and 1924, when the Pact government gained political ascendancy, was the time of the construction of racial capitalism. As Terreblanche outlines:

> The Mines and Workers Act consolidated the job-reservation system in mining and industry in 1911; the Native Land Act was passed in 1913; the Native Affairs Act for the administration of the African reserves in 1920 and the Native (Urban Areas) Act for the administration of African locations in 1923 (1994: 6).

Like Siamese twins, racism and capitalism therefore constituted the forces that incubated South Africa's historical consciousness. In periodizing South Africa's history, Terreblanche summarises it thus:

> The 120 years of economic modernisation since 1870 can be divided into three periods [...]: the period of British imperial conquest (1870–1910); the period of racial capitalism and segregation (1910–1948) (under the firm control of the local English Establishment with the Chamber of Mines at its core); and the period of Afrikaner Volkkapitalisme and apartheid (1948–1990) (1994: 2).

Like Cock and Wells, Terreblanche traces racial domination in South Africa to the beginning of British conquest in 1870, but it is worth remembering that racism actually arrived with the Dutch East India Company/Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC) in 1652. Richard Elphick and Hermann Giliomee (1979) argue that race and class had close correlation in the early Cape because of the policies of the VOC, and suggest that: '(A)n implication of our view is that the origin of Cape racial order is one of the antecedents of the modern South African racial order' (1979: 523).

Reflecting on the nature of Europe's racialisation of the world in the 16th and 17th centuries, Elphick and Giliomee state that 'like all colonising peoples of the period, the Dutch were convinced of the superiority of their culture and religion. Cultural chauvinism was an important component of racism...' (ibid). The Dutch, according to Elphick and Giliomee, '... arrived at the Cape with a "somatic norm image" or a collectively held picture of ideal human appearance' (ibid). Therefore, even in its nascent stages, what would evolve into the South African state was deeply rooted in notions of racial difference as a predicate to racial privilege. As argued earlier, throughout the formation of South Africa's history, megalothymia ('the desire to be recognised as superior') bore racial imprint. This deeply-etched point of view would prove contradictory to the corrective measures of the post-apartheid context.

Racial privilege was elevated to official state policy with the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 when mining and agricultural capital ('gold' and 'maize') could not take off without a constant and reliable supply of cheap labour. To make matters worse, the Union government had to confront the spectre of the 'poor white problem', resulting from multiple factors, including the British 'scorched earth' policy and the mechanisation of agriculture. Both government and white capital also came to the realisation that as long as Black people had access to land ownership, white access to cheap and available labour would remain a pipedream; hence the Native Land Act of 1913.

Throughout the segregation and apartheid governments, the 'poor white problem' would shape the contours of South Africa's historical trajectory. In a society defined by racial identity, the notion of the white subject sinking into conditions of poverty akin to those of the Black subject imperilled the key claims of the racial order itself (MacDonald, 2006; De Kiewiet, 1959). In occupying the same existential space as Africans, against whom they had been socialised to see themselves as superior, the white working class found itself in an untenable social situation. As De Kiewiet explains:

> It was at the turn of the century that it became evident that white society had developed within itself disturbing inequalities. At the base of white society had gathered, like sediment, a race of men so abject in their poverty, so wanting in resourcefulness, that they stood dangerously close to the native themselves (1959: 181).

Sharing a station in life with Black people went against the grain of notions of white supremacy and therefore posed an existential danger to the racist ontology of the state. The megalothymia propelled by this racist ontology was undermined by these racially indistinguishable social conditions. Both the segregation and apartheid states therefore aimed to privilege white capital and white workers at the cost of African labour. This was purportedly to maintain the separation of the two cultures, but in truth it maintained white economic privilege. MacDonald expresses this point lucidly in explaining that:

> the state, then, siphoned wealth from blacks and split it between white society, in the form of inflated profit. But the state also responded to the political power of whites by enhancing the living standards of whites (or citizens) with resources that were generated through the hyper-exploitation of blacks (or non-citizens) (2006: 58).

Throughout the history of South Africa, and especially starting with the era of British segregation, race implicated class as successive governments' efforts were directed at addressing the 'poor white problem', as white supremacy would not hear of white people wallowing in the same dehumanising social conditions which were the lot of African people.

Both skilled and unskilled white labour were distressed in their own respective ways. Skilled white labour feared the disconcerting tendency of capital to employ cheap but skilled Black labour at sub-market rates, which invariably undercut their bargaining position. Unskilled white labour – consisting of migrants to urban and industrial centres from doomed rural, agricultural conditions – feared competition from the multitudes of cheap, unskilled, African labour who could perform sweated labour for slave-like pay.

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Louis Botha, the first prime minister of the Union of South Africa, agonised over the reliable provision of African labour, the warp and woof of the new polity (Myers, 2008). Botha argued that indirect rule would be unsuited to the country's needs because it physically located African labour outside the white areas which sorely needed it (ibid). As Myers puts it, 'for Botha, a black working class was an inseparable – albeit unequal – component of the South African settler society, whose hierarchy would be reproduced using nothing more than the state's basic repressive machine' (2008: 13).

For their part, white workers – under the sway of the skilled segment of the white work force – agitated for the protection of their privileges as a racial group under the guise of not being reduced to the 'uncivilised' status of natives. As a result, 'whites formed labour unions in the early 1900s to guard against this persistent tendency, and the South African Labour Party (SALP) was formed in 1908 to explicitly advance the interests of European workers' (Hazlett, in Henderson, 1993). Dressing the issue of white privilege in the garb of political respectability, Frederic Creswell – who was later to become the leader of the Labour Party – rebutted the mining capital's argument for native labour on the grounds that reliance on African labour represented a threat to the future of white society (De Kiewiet, 1957).

In analysing the history of racial capital in South Africa, Harold Wolpe (1980) has employed the theory of the 'articulation of modes of production' to argue that traditional African economies existed side-by-side with the market economy, with the former situated in an auxiliary position. While Wolpe's thesis is larger than the scope of this argument, his most salient, apposite contention is that the segregation government used the two modes of production to sustain the exploitation of Black migrant workers, whose sub-market payment was compensated for by the agricultural produce in the reserves, where they retained reciprocal relations with their kin (Wolpe, 1980). This absolved the state and capital of the responsibility to maintain social production and

reproduction by taking care of the Black workers once they were worn out. By implication, and as MacDonald argues, the under-payment of Black migrant workers was not only to the advantage of capital, but to white workers too.

## The 1922 Rand Strike and the Pact Government of 1924

Both the 1922 Rand Strike and the Pact government of 1924 were incremental steps in the process building up to apartheid, which would come into being in 1948. At the centre of these developments were white labour interests. Afrikaner nationalism gained ground as the poor, working classes could not take the heat from the unfriendly policies of capital. In further illuminating this history, Janis Grobbelaar states that:

> Afrikaner nationalism, the strategies and organisational infrastructures forged to give it momentum, the rewards and patronage with which it has endowed its adherents and the mobilising and modernising tendencies it has engendered lead to the embourgeoisement of the majority of white South Africans – especially those of Afrikaner descent – via majority of white South Africans – especially those of the civil services and in a series of white Afrikaner dominated parastatals that were established. (White Afrikaner males were the special recipients of those very rewarding affirmative action strategies) (in Zegeye, 2001: 305).

Exclusionary and implemented at the cost of African workers, the laws which the Pact government brought about not only entrenched the further misery of the Black proletariat but also, at the cost of Black labour, promoted the racial and class progress/mobility of white people as a group.

The 1922 Rand Revolt represented a clear tipping point in the relations between Black and white labour, as well as affirming primary contradictions between labour and capital, irrespective of colour. It indicated the fluid and contingent relations between labour – be it Black or white – and capital, as well as further lending credence to the absolute importance of profit as the raison d'être for capital. As historiography has shown, the 1922 Rand Revolt was instigated by the unusual step of mining capital to lower the labour costs of white workers in the face of depressed profits,

as that of Africans had already reached miserably low levels (De Kiewiet, 1959; Magubane, 2007, 1979, 1996; Terreblanche, 1994).

The 1922 Rand Revolt's key thrust was avowedly white supremacist, as evidenced by its slogan: 'workers of the world unite for a white South Africa'. The Revolt also represented a fightback against the 'betrayal' (on racial grounds) by the Smuts government and capital (Magubane, 1996; De Kiewiet, 1959). In unabashedly appropriating and repurposing the revolutionary Marxist slogan, white workers demonstrated a dyed-in-the-wool racist animus within the framework of the political economy. In Fukuyamian lexicon, the white workers of 1922 did not just seek for fairness and justice in their relationship with the mine owners: they sought to maintain conditions that recognised them as superior to Black people at all costs. In other words, they sought to possess megalothymia in its racial variant. Terreblanche states that:

> After the Rand Revolt of 1922, the Smuts government became convinced that conditions conducive to accumulation (i.e. of profit) and legitimation (i.e. of the state in the eyes of the white community) could only be guaranteed if the economic position of the white proletariat and the African petit bourgeoisie could be secured (2002: 249).

Securing the interests of the white working class could only mean further compromising those of the Black workers, further deracinating their isothymia. Race had trumped class solidarity in the face of common capitalist exploitation of the proletariat, as amply demonstrated by the outcome of the strike and its political ramifications. For one thing, the Pact government unseated the Botha-Smuts government in the 1924 national election, on the ticket of upholding policies which entrenched and perpetuated the vested interests of white over Black workers. This essentialisation of race as a central axis of South African society saw an array of racist laws come into being. Many Africans lost their jobs as a direct result of the Pact government's policies. The 1925 Mines and Works (Colour Bar) Act 'finally established in the law of the land the principle that the right of a man to do skilled work depends on the colour of his skin' (Roux, 1948: 152).

Quite clearly, the Pact government was occasioned by historical exigency to mollify relations between capital and white workers, on the one hand, and canonise the

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perpetual economic servility of Black workers, on the other. As Peter Walshe argues:

> When the new Pact Government began to apply its 'civilised labour' policy, passing further discriminatory legislation, and Hertzog began to explain his approach to the Native problem, congressmen were quick to discern the repressive nature of the supposed new deal. The 'civilised labour' policy initiated in 1924 and the 'Colour Bar' Act of 1926 (Mines and Works Amendment Act) were seen for what they were – an integral part of Hertzog's comprehensive 'solution' to the Native problem and a means towards his expressed goal of permanent white supremacy outside the reserves (1971: 109).

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This historical evolution of oppressive labour laws culminated in the 1948 apartheid state which saw the National Party assume political power with the explicit aim of making Black South Africans 'hewers of wood and drawers of water'. With exclusive political citizenship, white people would benefit from a government with which they had shared cultural affinities under the umbrella of Afrikaner nationalism.

What is also historically worth noting about the leitmotif of the Pact government is its 'welfare state

policy which was geared towards compensating poorer whites (of which over 70 percent were Afrikaans) for the impoverishment and disruption they were suffering as a consequence of modernisation and urbanisation' (Terreblanche, 1994: 10). This measure found historical parallel in the post-1994 political scenario when the ruling African National Congress (ANC) introduced affirmative action policies to which most white and especially Afrikaner organisations objected vociferously, citing reverse racism. Afrikaner nationalism was exclusionary and insensitive to the existence of the 'other' and, in its quest to empower its own, 'it had a clear economic interventionist thrust' (Terreblanche, 1994: 12).

The coming into existence of the apartheid state was occasioned by the Afrikaner nationalist economic self-interest. In explaining this development, Hazlett submits that:

> The problem apartheid attacked was circular. Economic cooperation among the races led to social integration. Social integration led to further economic cooperation because industrialists found low-wage blacks irresistible. Racists saw social separation enforced by law – apartheid – as the essential way to shore up the economic protection of white labour (in Henderson, ed., 1993: 17).

Apartheid further entrenched racially privileged white Afrikaner nationalism and excluded Africans, Indians, and Coloureds from the polity through what it termed 'separate development' (Terreblanche, 1994; MacDonald, 2006). Apartheid continued to provide state welfare to working class Afrikaners throughout its lifespan until the 1980s (Terreblanche, 1994). Separate development, according to Terreblanche (1994), was one of the 'almost desperate attempts made by successive National Party heads of state to crystallise a new ideology which could legitimise (or mystify) the continuation of white supremacy and the structures of racial exploitation' (1994: 15). Separate development represented a move away from the segregationist era's avowed racist policy to a policy of 'racialism'. MacDonald (2006) states that 'racialism insinuates race as a defining human attribute, a central axis of human society

and political organisation, a fulcrum of political representation and participation'. Despite the sleight of hand to delineate apartheid as separate but equal political arrangements, the fundamental inequalities resulting from structured relationships of dominance remained and continued well until the 1994 democratic breakthrough.

**Racism in the Post-Apartheid Era**

Though it ushered in a political seismic change in South Africa's racially charged history, the 1994 democratic breakthrough only represented political change and not structural transformation (Habib, 2013; Mbeki, 2009; Terreblanche, 2002). The structural imbalances and inequities emanating from the history of racialised capitalism are still in place. However, over the course of this historical trajectory, some socio-economic fluidity has also emerged. Terreblanche (1994) argues that during the course of the anti-apartheid struggle much damage was done to the South African economy, which also affected the fortunes of the white working class. He notes that the most affected incomes were those of Afrikaner households 'in the ranks of the lower 40 percent' (1994: 22). As the political economy was the pivot of 'white politics', such drastic changes swelled the ranks of Afrikaner rightwing nationalism, which, considering its history of comfort at the expense of the Black workforce, was to be expected. Yet this resurgence in racial consciousness was not to end on the dawn of the new democratic dispensation.

Given the deteriorating economic conditions of the Afrikaner working class and the corresponding rise in rightwing discourse, as well as the massive racial imbalances and great expectations of the formerly oppressed, when the democratic era dawned in 1994 it was already potentially afflicted with congenital impediments. At the same time, one could draw the conclusion that the reconciliatory policies and tone of Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first democratically elected president, on the back of heavy compromises by the ANC, narrowed the space for strident right wing assertions in the face of the certainty of loss of state power.

What resuscitated racial rancour, however, were the democratic government's policies of redress, which included, among others, affirmative action, Black

Economic Empowerment, affirmative procurement, and countless other means of enabling Black people to stake a claim in the economy of South Africa. As stated above, some observers have blamed the neoliberal policy choices of the ANC for the country's failed economic performance, which, in turn, has resuscitated primordial identities. Because South Africa's concept of identity is racially circumscribed, addressing social imbalances goes against the grain of racial sensibility as those who benefited from the unjust past interpret current redress as racial role swapping. Transformation is perceived in sweeping, racialised generalisations to the extent that it is seen to represent a threat to livelihoods. De Kiewiet has made the acute observation that:

> In spite of the labours of many students of native life, there continued to prevail amongst most classes of white society a remarkable lack of precise and unequivocal knowledge of native life. It was no shape for the legislator to be ignorant of the condition of the greater part of the population (1959: 226).

Could it be that these sweeping generalisations ignore the fact that the majority of Black working class communities are still trapped in historically-induced conditions of powerlessness? In a country were racial and spatial historical patterns are still deeply entrenched, ignorance could still be bliss.

To be sure, post-apartheid South Africa has seen a tiny section of political elites, most of them the results of government affirmative procurement policies, rise up the social ladder to become both visible and vocal (Habib, 2013). Joining the ranks of the white middle class and the rich, the growth of this Black, and especially African, elite contrasts with increasing social inequality as the majority of unskilled, uneducated Black South Africans sink deeper into conditions of impoverishment. Similarly, it would not be drawing the long bow to say, as Terreblanche has argued about the period leading up to democracy, that a significant number of white people, especially Afrikaners, are also facing impoverishment.

Fukuyama (2018) has argued that identity and the politics of resentment characterise modern societies, where communities of European descent who have benefited from racial privilege push back against

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assertive formulations for equality by historically marginalised groups, with the former invariably appropriating the latter's mode of discourse to cast itself as the victim of reverse marginalisation and racism. Post-apartheid South Africa is not too far from this portrait.

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Sharing his musings on this theme, Dirk Hermann, the CEO of Solidarity, an Afrikaner lobby group, states the following in an imaginary letter to 'Mother Africa':

> Why is my quest for a place in Africa racism, but that of my brothers a justified quest? Why are you silent about certain parts of history while you emphasise others? (2018: 59)

Ruminating along similar lines, Ernst Roets, deputy CEO of AfriForum, 'a civil rights organisation', opines that:

> Technically there is no legal basis according to which my race is defined. 'White' is not defined in the Employment Equity Act, nor in the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act, nor in the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act. 'Black', however, is defined as

'generic terms referring to Africans, coloureds and Indians' (2018: 67).

Both of these speakers are influential members of Afrikaner communities and historical products of Afrikaner nationalism. Their opinions are representative of a fairly large section of the Afrikaner community. One can infer that their thinking does not seem to appreciate the presence of history in post-apartheid South Africa.

Afrikaner sentiment respecting the loss of power and the process of transformation, imperfect and deformed as it is, echoes the history that has incubated it. The ethnic nationalism that bound the Afrikaner system of thought over generations will not merge easily into the wider South African nationalism ushered in by the democratic era. Zegeye maintains that:

> The Afrikaner image was forged by ideologues. To be an Afrikaner entailed having a sense of belonging to that group, and birth into the Volk (in terms of Afrikaner ideologues an imagined community of racially similar people [...]) superseded identification with the state (2001: 7).

One could be excused for detecting a historical continuity here with the history of racialised capitalism. As De Kiewiet notes:

> Without special protection, he (i.e. the white, Afrikaner worker) could meet native competition only by a fatal reduction in his own standard of living, and that would simply permit the lower civilisation to drive out the higher civilisation (1959: 225).

Disentangling oneself from this framework of thinking in the face of a declining economic situation may not be all that easy. However, the majority of the Afrikaner community is not wallowing in a debilitated economic state. Responding to this train of thought within the white community, Terreblanche emphasises that:

> It is rather hypocritical of whites to claim these benefits with greedy self-righteousness but decline any responsibility (directly or indirectly) for the evil of colonisation and its ugly consequences. In as much as these problems have resulted not only from whites' obsession with power and entrenched

privileges but also from their short-sightedness, greed, and reductionist individualism, white South Africans ought to realise that they cannot be effectively addressed without a willingness to make substantial sacrifices – materially and symbolically – as part of an open commitment to the restoration of social justice (2002: 5).

For his part, Peter Hudson sees the structural continuities not only of material inequalities, but also of racism, disguised by the system of democracy. Hudson argues that:

> colonialism does not disappear but is repressed and unconscious. This does not, however, prevent it from continuing to structure social practice. It does this without seeming to disrupt the democratic non-racial order by inserting itself in an ambivalence at the heart of capitalism (in Satgar, 2018: 159).

**Conclusion**

In a society where superordinate national identity had never been constructed, the rising tide of African nationalism, the transformation of the state in demographic terms, and the redistribution of the economic dividend enhanced pre-existing ethnic macro-identities between the Black and the white working classes, exacerbating a climate of resentment (Fukuyama, 2006).

The eradication of legislative racial privilege in post-apartheid South Africa has dispossessed the white working class of this shelter, which in turn has led to the perception of group marginalisation or reverse racism as legislative redress of past racial imbalances takes place within an ever-shrinking economic base that cannot commensurately sustain adequate living standards for all. The post-colonial resurgence of African identity is being perceived by poor working-class white (Afrikaner) communities as evidence of the shoe being on the other foot: i.e. the perception that they are in turn the victims of state oppression.

Fukuyama has contended that '...demand for recognition of one's identity is a master concept that unifies much of what is going on in the world today' (2018: XV). Therefore, the rising tide of unemployment and the corresponding deracialised impoverishment affecting both the Black and white working classes – and possibly the former

more acutely – is perceivable by the latter, which had historically been socialised into the thought-system of comparatively better material wellbeing, as systematic marginalisation (Magubane, 1996, 1979; Fredrickson, 1934; De Kiewiet, 1957). In decomposing the working class along racial lines, both ideologically and materially, settler colonialism implanted a dichotomous albeit mutually hostile trans-historical consciousness between the two working class segments. This consciousness is still extant in the post-apartheid era, albeit in a more subtle and attenuated form.

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